

A LOST LOVE.

Withered the lily fair,
Faded the roses,
Brown leaves are falling where
My love reposes.

Not as in days gone by,
In these arms nestled—
When love and life and joy
Nature invested.

But, alas! still and cold,
Lying all lowly,
Covered by earth's green mould—
Making it holy.

With the flowers gone to rest,
Peacefully sleeping;
Love o'er her slumber blest,
Fond watch is keeping,

Sleeps she till winter's night
Breaks into dawning,
Then to rise in the bright
Glow of the morning.

THE STORY-TELLER.

The Squire of Waldenshoe.

CHAPTER I.

"A fine place! Upon my word, a very fine place!"

The speaker, Robert Hilton, was a man whose first youth had passed, leaving traces of struggle and toil upon the dark-browed forehead, and lines of indulged passion and uncurbed pride about the eyes and mouth. He was leaning forward in a handsomely-appointed carriage; but the hand which lay upon the door was coarse, and appeared to have been hardened by menial work; it was not by any means a gentleman's hand, although the little finger was adorned by a gem of considerable value.

"Yes, the place is quite equal to the description we had of it," replied his companion. "There's timber for you! Why, each of those oaks is worth seventy or eighty guineas."

"Do you think that I intend to run through my twenty thousand of loose cash in such a hurry as to let you get your greedy claws on them, Mr. Brett? No, thank you. I've a taste for the picturesque, though you mayn't think it."

The carriage was passing through a really beautiful park, of sufficient extent to be worthy of the name. The ground was hilly, and broken here and there into deep rocky valleys, where ivy and great glistening masses of fern clustered round the boles of the lofty beeches. A shallow stream ran brawling over its rough channel close by the side of the drive; and in the foreground, and over the more distant slopes, were grouped, in all the careless magnificence of the superb landscape-gardening, the mighty forest trees of the midland counties. The scene was one of which an owner might well be proud; and Robert Hilton gazed at it with appreciating eyes—for this was Waldenshoe, and he its fortunate possessor.

A long train of circumstances had led to the grand old mansion's passing to this son of a branch of the family long ignored and forgotten. Hugh Walden, the late master of the place, had quarrelled with his brother and his brother's children, who were his heirs, and had directed search to be made for the descendants of an aunt of his who had run away with a penniless officer—Hilton by name—and had been disinherited by her irate father. None knew what her fate had been; and it was not until after the old man's death that traces of her whereabouts were discovered, and her grandson, the first mate on board the good ship "Three Sisters," was informed that his distant relative, Hugh Walden, of Waldenshoe, had died, making him heir to the whole of his property, without condition or reservation.

Robert Wilton at once resigned his seaman's ship, and proceeded to London, to see with his own eyes the wonderful document which was to transform him from a hard-working, hard-handed sailor into the country gentleman, the associate of the magnates of the land. And there sure enough, the will was—not to be disputed or misunderstood—in the hands of the grave-looking family lawyer, whose ancestors had had charge of the legal business of the Waldens for generations. The eminently respectable man of law was scandalised by Robert Hilton's loud words and overbearing manner; and when hinted doubts of his honesty, and accusations of self-interest which were more than hinted, came coarsely from the sailor's lips, he intimated to his new client that the row of tin boxes with "Waldenshoe" painted upon their sides must henceforth repose on shelves in some other office than his.

Mr. Hilton was in nowise disconcerted. There were as good fish still in the sea as ever came out of it, he thought; and the dignified lawyer was not at all to his taste. He "had no mind to be dictated to by a man whom he paid with pounds, shillings, and pence for the work he did, or professed to do;" so he received the resignation very placidly, and put his business into the hands of Mr. Brett, a person whom he knew well, and who suited him much better than did the Waldens' old solicitor. Accompanied by this

same Mr. Brett, he was now, for the first time, driving up the avenue, and trying to realise that he was indeed the Squire of Waldenshoe.

A group of servants awaited his arrival within the porch, eager to welcome the "rising sun," and to proffer their requests to be retained in his service. But his arrogant demeanor had somewhat the same effect on them as it had had on the lawyer.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Norris," said the butler to the gold-spectacled housekeeper, "if that's to be the new way of ordering, and them's to be the civillest words one is to hear, I'm not going to stay more than my month, that's very certain."

"Hush, hush!" was the response. "If you speak so loud, you'll be heard."

"Well, and suppose I am? We are servants, to be sure, but we are neither his slave nor his debtors."

Very much disgusted was this same independent-minded butler when, after he had placed the wine on the table, and arranged the dessert, and was about to retire from the dining-room, his master, wheeling his chair round, desired him to remain.

"Now tell me about everything," said Mr. Hilton, staring him straight in the face. "Who lives about here? Have I many neighbors who are good sort of folk?"

"There is the Castle, sir, Lord Towerham's place; but his lordship is abroad on a diplomatic mission," answered the butler, loftily, resolved to show Mr. Hilton that he at least knew how to speak with propriety. "And there are Sir John Cordeaux and his family, who reside about two miles from here; and there is Mr. Philip Walden."

"Mr. Philip Walden!"

"Yes, sir; the nephew of my late master. He lives in the White House at the upper end of the village, with his mother and the young ladies."

"He does! And pray what does he live on, now that his uncle's banknotes have come to line my pockets instead of his, eh?"

"I have never had the inquisitiveness or the insolence to inquire into his private affairs, sir."

Mr. Hilton sprang from his chair with a few strong expressions, more fit for the deck of the "Three Sisters," than for the dining-room of Waldenshoe.

"Insolence, indeed!" he thundered. "Be off with you for an impudent rascal! No, not another word I'll hear! You wish to give me warning, do you? All the better. Be off, and shut the door after you."

"Now, did ever you hear the like of that?" said he, addressing Mr. Brett, when the butler had withdrawn. Servants indeed setting up to teach their very masters! I'll teach them, I'll engage, and that before they're many days older!"

Mr. Brett filled his glass again and passed the decanter of port before he answered.

"Teach them as much as you like, my dear fellow, but pray be a little more cautious—a little more suave. If you behave like this (you must forgive my plain speaking) the county will vote you a bear, and perhaps cut you altogether; but, if you can only hit their fancy, there is nothing you may not aspire to—M. P., or even—"

"M. P. he hanged!" broke in Robert, Hilton, angrily. "I shan't aspire to anything more than I've got already; and we shall see if the county will cut me when I've all these broad acres to keep me in countenance."

Mr. Brett looked through the open window at the terrace walk, with its handsome balustrade and marble statues gleaming through the dusk of the warm September twilight. He looked at the groups of noble trees which sheltered the lawns and shrubberies; and then he looked at the dark portraits of bewigged and bepowdered knights and dames who had in turn lounged on the terraces and sauntered on the lawns, and, as he looked, he thought it highly probable that his friend was right, and that the world would be inclined to forgive a great deal in the Squire of Waldenshoe.

CHAPTER II.

Dessert was on the table at Wynstone Hall, the seat of Sir John Cordeaux; but, though the silver epergnes and the antique glass were as rich and as rare as those upon Robert Hilton's board, yet the same lavish profusion of costly viands and old wines was absent from the Baronet's table. A better light than the shadowy evening one would have shown that the Turkey carpet was wearing threadbare, and that the crimson draperies of the mullioned windows were faded and frayed. Some malicious tongues had even whispered that the diamond aligrette which flashed in Lady Cordeaux's raven hair was only paste, and that the real jewels—herloom from the time of Queen Bess—had gone to help to pay off some of the heavy debts which were hanging like a millstone round her husband's neck.

The property had been heavily encumbered before his time, and a large family of sons, requiring expensive education and suitable allowances, had not contributed to lessen difficulties or to pay off mortgages. Many of his boys were off his hands, now, but the state of his finances continued to give Sir John cause for unceasing worry and anxiety, and he had more than once talked of going abroad for a time to try to straighten matters. But he was getting elderly, and full-grown trees do not bear transplanting; he shrank from the effort, necessary though he felt it to be; and year by year things looked blacker and blacker at Wynstone Hall.

"Papa," said Miss Cordeaux, the youngest and the best beloved of all his children, "do you know that Mr. Hilton was expected to-day?"

"Yes, Harry, I know it, and, what is more, I have seen him."

"Oh, papa, what is he like?" and Lady Cordeaux roused herself from the surreptitious little nap in which she had been indulging under cover of the twilight, to echo her daughter's query.

"Really, my dears, I can't tell you, for I don't know."

"But you say you have seen him?"

"I saw two gentlemen driving in a Waldenshoe carriage; one was dark and middle-aged, and wore a 'wide-awake,' while the other was thin and fair and smiling, with a very new shiny hat—what you would call a dapper little man. Now, Harry, you determine what he is like."

"The new shiny hat tells tales, papa. I rather fancy that Mr. Hilton is a dapper little man."

"You will call on him at once, I suppose?" said Lady Cordeaux.

"Yes—some time next week; and, my dear, we must have a dinner-party for him. As we are his principal neighbors, it falls to our lot to introduce him to our world here; so you and Harry had better review your forces, and see what we can do for him in that line."

Sir John Cordeaux had an idea in his head which caused him to suggest the dinner-party—an idea vague and undefined as yet, but which had nevertheless occupied a good share of his thoughts for many days past. Mr. Hilton had been suddenly raised from humble life to unexpected affluence and position. He must necessarily be ignorant of the ways of society, and he must also as evidently need a wife. Now why should not he, Sir John Cordeaux, establish a claim on his gratitude by becoming his god-father, as it were, in the county? And why should not Harry have the first and best chance of becoming mistress of Waldenshoe?

Sir John loved his pretty daughter more, perhaps, than he had loved anything else on earth, excepting himself. He would not force her inclinations for the world—so he said—but he could see no reason why she should not be Robert Hilton's wife as well as any other girl in England, and no reason why she should not respect him, and love him, and all the rest of it, as a wife should. He had always suspected that there was "a something" between her and Philip Walden; and long ago, when Harriet and Philip were hardly more than children, the suspicion and anticipation had given him and Lady Cordeaux infinite pleasure. But affairs were changed now. Old Hugh Walden had disinherited his brother and his brother's children in summary fashion; and Sir John was now in terror lest there really might be some attachment in that quarter. The Squire's brother had died before himself, and many thought that the event might have softened the old man's rancor, and that Philip might yet have his rights; but the opinion proved to be a mistaken one, and the will in favor of the Hiltons remained unaltered. Now Philip was awedly looking out for something to do, whereby he might aid his widowed mother, and help to maintain his two sisters. Sir John hated to see Harriet still so intimate with the Waldens at the White House; he felt sure that Philip was honorable enough not to attempt to woo Miss Cordeaux as long as he had nothing to offer her; but yet it was not well that the young people should be so much together. Mr. Hilton would prove a valuable diversion, and, if things were properly managed, a few months might set at rest all anxiety on that score. "It is absolutely necessary that Harry should marry a rich man, bless her," said Sir John to himself; "for I don't see how I am to give her more than enough to buy gowns and pocket-handkerchiefs."

CHAPTER III.

Early on the morrow Mr. Hilton and his friend ordered saddle-horses from the well-stocked stables, and proceeded to "go over" the estate. If they had been pleased and astonished the evening before, they were doubly so now. Such snug farmsteads, such excellent cottages, such valuable woods! Truly the late mate of the "Three Sisters" had good reason to congratulate himself on his new berth.

"Come round by the station, Brett," he said, as they neared home on their return—"it is but a mile or so farther. I want to make inquiry about that gun that I ordered to be sent after me from London. I suppose this is the right road," and he reined his horse into a green lane which turned off at right angles to the one which they had been pursuing.

"I shall not go with you, I think," replied Mr. Brett. "I'm not much accustomed to horse exercise, and I'm about done up already."

So the friends parted, and, with a little rather disdainful rally, Robert Hilton took his way to the railway-station. Sailor as he was, he could ride well enough, and he touched with the whip the spirited creature he bestowed, and dashed along the winding lane at a rattling pace. A few minutes brought him in sight of the station—a pretty little building, with deep wooden eaves and rose-covered walls, and a small white gate leading on to the platform. No porters happened to be about; and so, lifting the latch with his hunting-whip, he rode forward in search of one.

A fair, delicate-looking lady in mourning stood on the platform with two children beside her, apparently waiting for the train, and talking with her Mr. Hilton noticed a tall girl possessing

one of the most beautiful faces he had ever seen in his life. Dark brown hair, yet darker brown eyes, a rich clear skin—all these she had; but it was the broad brow, the quiet, firm look upon the curving lips, which made the face unlike all other faces in its powerful yet sweet originality.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs made her turn, and she raised her eyes with a quick look of surprise and curiosity to his. Robert Hilton had been "a gentleman" for only the short space of a fortnight, and he had scarcely had time to re-model his manners yet. He was guilty of the rudeness of staring in a manner so pointed that the lady turned away and walked to a little distance, covering her confusion by playing with the children as she went.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said a voice behind him, "but you had better not bring your horse here; the—"

"Oh, the horse will do no harm. I came to inquire if there is a package here for me from London—I am Mr. Hilton, of Waldenshoe."

The station-master touched his hat.

"No, sir; nothing has come yet. But indeed, sir, I must ask you to ride outside the gate; this is quite against the rules—and there's the down express now in sight, sir! It will be here in another minute!"

But Robert Hilton had grown wonderfully impatient of control since he had heard of old Mr. Walden's eccentric will. The very spirit of contradiction seemed to possess him now. Instead of doing as he was requested, he merely turned his head to look where the long thread of snow-white steam showed the advancing train. It came on in the full swing of its speed, for it, but stopped rarely between London and York, and the little station of Waldenshoe was one of the insignificant places through which it daily rushed on its panting whirling journey.

If Mr. Hilton turned to glance at it unconcernedly, his horse was not so cool. The dilated eye, and the quivering nostril, drawn back so as to display the blood-red flesh, were evidences of terror which were not lost upon the station-master.

"For Heaven's sake sir," he implored, "go away!"

The alarm of his voice and manner affected Mr. Hilton at last, and he tried to do as he was bidden; but it was too late now. The horse reared and plunged, but would not face towards the little gate, frightened by the roar of the express, and its cloud of dust and smoke, as the train rushed onward with terrific speed. The terrified porters shrieked away. The lady in mourning drove her children before her through the gate, with quick motherly instinct, to shield them from danger. The maddened horse plunged nearer and nearer the edge of the platform. In an instant more they would be over—horse and rider beneath the wheels of the train!

Robert Hilton never knew exactly what happened during that awful instant. He saw a small white hand stretched forward and upward to seize the bridle, and he saw the white flutter of a handkerchief. Then came a blast of wind, and with a thundering sound the train flashed by. He slowly dismounted from his horse, which stood still, trembling in every limb, and with the white foam covering its glossy skin. He quite forgot that he was the Squire of Waldenshoe; he quite forgot all about his wide lands, and his many possessions; and in his forgetfulness he became more manly and gentle than he had been since he was a lad in his father's home, before his wild rough life had made him what he was.

He lifted his hat and stood bareheaded before the girl who had so readily and nobly sprung forward to save him from a frightful death.

"Madam, how can I thank you?"

"Very easily," was the light answer. "You ought rather to thank your own sharp bit and strong curb chain, for my strength could not have availed much without them."

"And they wouldn't have done much towards holding the brute had you not blinded his eyes with your handkerchief," he rejoined. "I owe you my life?"

"I am glad if I have been of any use;" and with a little bow the lady turned away to rejoin her companion.

"Oh, Harriet, how brave of you!" were the first words of greeting, while the children sprang forward with noisy acclamations.

"There, there, do be quiet, and let us get away from here," said Miss Cordeaux—for she it was. "Just see how the people are beginning to talk and stare. Do let us make haste home."

The lady in mourning was Mrs. Archer, Philip Walden's widowed sister, who was on a visit at the White House. She knew Harriet Cordeaux too well to speak to her any more just then. She saw, by the compressed lips and the glitter in the brown eyes, that the present moment was not one to be intruded on. So they walked silently along the road until Harriet herself broke the silence by a heavy sigh.

"What geese we women are, Amy!" she said, with a little laugh. "We are always frightened when the danger is past."

"It was very terrible," returned Mrs. Archer, turning her pale face towards Miss Cordeaux; "I can't think how you could have had the bravery to throw yourself under those terrible hoofs. It was the greatest miracle that you were not drawn over with the horse beneath the train yourself!"

"I should have let go my hold before that happened, I suppose; but there wasn't much time to calculate chances. I'm very glad I was able to save that beautiful creature from being smashed to pieces."

"And the beautiful creature's master."